

Accountability Letters to Victims

Congratulations on your decision to write a letter to your victim taking responsibility for your crime. Please remember these points:

- ☐ The letter is voluntary.
- ☐ Participation in this program is an opportunity for you to make amends.
- ☐ Your victim may choose not to receive your letter or respond.
- ☐ If you still feel sorry for yourself because you were arrested and sentenced, you are not ready to write a letter.
- ☐ If you expect your victim to forgive, you are not ready to write a letter.
- ☐ Your victim might like to hear what you are doing to change your criminal behavior.
- ☐ Be brief. Fewer words are often better than too many.

THANK YOU!

Accountability Letter Program Offender Request to Participate

Please give this form and your letter to a case manager, treatment specialist, victim services staff or supervising officer. You also may mail it to the MDOC address on the bottom of this form. **Do not mail or attempt to deliver a letter to a victim yourself or through another party.** If you are writing letters to more than one victim, please submit a separate form with each.

Today's date: _____

Your name: _____

Your DOC number: _____

Crimes for which you are writing the letter. Include approximate dates and court case numbers if you know them: _____

Please provide any information that might help MDOC contact your victim to notify him or her about your letter. If possible, include full names and last known addresses. Victims include survivors, adult guardians of minor victims, witnesses, businesses and communities: _____

Accountability Letter Bank
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Montana Department
of Corrections
Victim Programs

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A brochure for offenders



Accountability Letters Questions & Answers

What is an accountability letter?

Individuals who commit crimes often have deep remorse for the harm they caused and would like their victims to know they have accepted responsibility. The Montana Department of Corrections (MDOC) encourages offenders to write letters to their victims demonstrating their accountability.

The letters are placed in a locked letter bank at MDOC. Victim services staff attempt to notify your victim that you have written an accountability letter. Each victim decides whether to receive a letter. Many victims want to see what their offenders have to say.

How do these letters help victims?

Victims typically remain fearful of their offenders. They may relive the terror they felt during the crime and the threats of retaliation that some offenders make at the time of arrest or sentencing.

A sincere letter promising no further harm can lessen a victim's fear. Your victim might like to read in your own words how you have changed through

programming, treatment and self-reflection. Reassurances that you intend no further harm can help your victim begin a healing process.

What if I'm not a good writer?

Write honestly and from the heart. Grammar and spelling are not as important as your thoughts. Ask a friend, case manager or supervising officer for help. If your handwriting is difficult to read, perhaps you can print or type the letter.

Will others read my letter?

One or two victim services staff members will review your letter and perhaps make a few suggestions. Letters that use inappropriate language or threaten harm will be returned. You can rewrite your letter and resubmit it later.

MDOC staff understands that an apology letter contains private thoughts you have decided to share with your victim. Once letters are accepted by the victim programs manager, they are placed in a locked file, and shown only to the victim or legal guardian of a child victim.

Will the parole board see my letter?

Accountability letters do not become part of your MDOC file and parole board members will not know that you have written a letter to your victim unless you tell them yourself.

Will my victim forgive me?

A decision to forgive someone is personal. Please do not request forgiveness because your victim is not responsible for your needs. The meaning of forgiveness varies among individuals and cultures. Your victim will forgive you if and when he or she is ready. Be careful that a lack of forgiveness does not become your excuse to remain "stuck" in criminal thinking.

Can I mail the letter to my victim?

No. Receiving mail from the offender can shock and cause further harm to the victim. Sending the letter yourself could result in disciplinary action for breaking your supervision rules or criminal prosecution for violating an order of protection.

How will I know if the victim receives and reads my letter?

Unless your victim chooses to acknowledge the letter, you will not know whether or not he or she received it. Even if your victim never sees your letter, however, writing it may help you cope with guilt, shame, remorse and other feelings about your crime. This can lead to healing for you.